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**THE WORLD FOOTBALL LEAGUE PLAYS ETHNOPOLIS UNITED**

**The Problems of Asymmetry and Interoperability in Future War**

**CORE COURSE 5605 ESSAY**

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## THE WORLD FOOTBALL LEAGUE PLAYS ETHNOPOLIS UNITED



### The Problems of Asymmetry and Interoperability in Future War

#### Back to the Future

In 2009, the NFL expanded to become the World Football League when new franchises were created in London, Berlin, Tokyo and Sydney. An attempt to establish a further team in Paris failed due to cultural problems, the French preferring to retain their own traditions. The high-tech American game generated considerable spectator and media interest, but the expensive new equipment and facilities needed to play it restricted the growth of the sport among the local populations. The WFL presence was only just sufficient to introduce people to the basics, but the game was never going to expand without major capital investment, something most countries were unprepared to do while the new sport remained unproven and while their traditional forms of football remained popular. Virtually all of the WFL players and coaches were American.

For the foreseeable future, the US will lead the world in high-technology warfare. Smaller nations, even those with an advanced technological base, are unlikely to be able to afford to procure successive rapidly evolving generations of weapons and C3I systems. Most will simply try to keep abreast of developments, planning to implement them fully only when threats to their own national interests justify the expense.

In January 2010, the Washington Redskins won the inaugural WFL Super Bowl and were proclaimed World Champions. The Washington Post ran headlines lauding the local team as the “First-Ever World Champions” and called the team “**THE** Super-Power Of World Football”

CNN broadcast a similar message Coca-Cola and McDonald's sold their products to the world in packages featuring the World Champion team

In Ethnoland, football fans were incensed Ethnoes were the real football world champions, having won the 2008 World Cup, and their capital's elite team, Ethnopolis United was on top of the Eurasian Football Association soccer competition The Ethnoes were fanatical about their football, which every Ethno played from a young age Football was their religion, and they saw the American claims to world "football" supremacy as an arrogant affront to it

Ethnoland's leaders had to respond to their people's demands for action They had to challenge and defeat the United States They recognized that the Americans were unbeatable at their own game, and that they could never match

The unambiguous threat of the Cold War era is gone Future threats and challenges to any nation may arise quickly and for seemingly obscure local political reasons The United States' leadership role and the threat that its cultural influence poses to other cultures make it a particular target

the United States for sheer power, so they needed to structure the challenge to maximize their own advantages

### **The Challenge is Formulated**

America's footballers were big, strong, well equipped, well trained, and coached to execute complex pre-planned plays with great skill But they were each highly specialized, and were accustomed to frequent breaks on the side-line, where they could rest and prepare for their next offensive play The sport had become so high-tech and dominated by these big, immensely strong athletes that only a small percentage of the population could actually play Most of the people were spectators who cheered on their team, provided the cash to pay the huge costs of

salaries and equipment, and enjoyed basking in the glory of its victories. The fans liked winners, and losing teams soon suffered from a loss of spectator support.

Ethnoland's footballers were smaller, but they were fit, fast, and agile. They didn't have sophisticated equipment, but they were very skillful, and didn't really need much in the way of equipment to play their version of football. Virtually everyone in the country knew how to play the game, and could be relied upon to support the team through thick and thin. The players would rather die than be defeated.

At Ethnopolis United's headquarters, the coaches formulated their strategy. America had a very strong team, but they felt that if they could restrict America's offense and stop it from scoring early, the team would quickly lose the support of its fans and the team management would lose confidence, wishing it had never accepted the challenge. Ethnoland was fully committed to victory, and its team was good, but the deciding factor would be the total support of the Ethno people, at home and overseas, who would do

The US has made clear its own aversion to casualties and its desire for quick and decisive victory. Challengers are likely to attempt to inflict casualties, not necessarily casualties of any direct military significance, and to prolong the conflict in order to break down US public support.

anything to help their team and the nation achieve the international recognition they deserved. The challenge would be issued on their terms, and the game would be played in a neighboring country where the team and their fans would feel most at home.

They thought that the American team would be weakened, not strengthened, by the inclusion of foreign players, and that they could best negotiate the terms of the challenge with an international body rather than with the Americans themselves. Ethnoland would therefore issue its challenge through the Union of National Football Associations to the WFL, so that the UK, Germany, Japan and Australia would feel they had to be represented, diluting the strength of the

Americans and complicating things for their coaching staff. As a bonus, when victory came, Ethnoland would have defeated the world, not just the US, and the fans would be ecstatic.

Saddam Hussein has effectively sought to marginalize the US by negotiating directly with the UN Secretary General over WMD inspections. This diplomatic strategy is likely to be repeated.

### **The Rules of the Game**

The UNFA was dominated by soccer-playing nations, so it was not hard for Ethnoland to shape the rules to suit its team. There were no American football fields in their part of the world, so the game would be played on the familiar turf of a soccer pitch. Immediately behind the goals would be the crowd of spectators, so the

Americans' main scoring weapon, the long pass into the end zone, could not be permitted. The only way of scoring would be to kick field goals, and the goals would be soccer goals of course. In fairness, only one player on each team would be permitted to handle the ball. The Americans could use their high-tech equipment if they wanted

The Gulf War clearly demonstrated US superiority in conventional operations. Future challengers are unlikely to confront the US head-on on a conventional battlefield, but are likely to try to shape the battle and the battlefield to frustrate US combat power. Saddam Hussein demonstrated his willingness to use his own people as human shields against US strike capabilities. Future battles may have to be fought in cities where the application of combat power may be impeded by the risk of civilian casualties and collateral damage.

- that was not a problem as the Ethnoland team had no intention of tackling them head on, or of being tackled by them. There would be no time-outs for the Americans to rest and plan their next offensive, only a short break between halves.

### **Preparations for the Game**

Pre-game preparations for the Ethnoland team were simple. The elite Ethnopolis United, the best soccer team in the world, would take the field. There were plenty of second-string

players, some almost as skillful, in other local teams to provide support if required. Most of the preparatory effort went towards organizing the fans both at home and overseas to support the team. Ethnoses living in the United States observed and reported the Americans' preparations. They bought as many of the US allocation of game tickets as possible using stolen credit card numbers, and made multiple bookings under false names for flights to the game, attempting to restrict the number of American supporters at the ground.

The WFL team's preparations were much more complicated. The UK, Germany, Japan and Australia insisted that true local players represent them. There was little time to prepare, and previous training sessions together had been highly structured affairs, designed to impart the basics to the foreigners and sell them on the new game and its equipment. The Redskins' coaches, fearing that their secret plays might be used against them in future WFL competition, would not teach them to the foreigners, making it difficult to integrate them into the team's offense. This meant that the foreign players would be restricted to protecting the flanks, while American players would make the real offensive plays straight up the middle of the ground. It was difficult to mobilize spectator support in any of the countries, as none of the populations saw it as a vital game, and only the Americans could really identify with the team.

The US is likely to seek coalition partners in future conflicts in order to legitimize its actions in the eyes of the world. Other nations are likely to become involved to pursue their own national interests, to gain a voice during conflict termination, and to enhance their international prestige. Unless they contribute real capability to the coalition force, they are likely to be more of an impediment than an asset.

Realistic combined training is essential to interoperability and effective integration. The increasing integration of command support systems and intelligence systems will make command and control of combined operations difficult until the technological issue of trusted multi-level security is solved.

Cooperative engagement systems increase the complexity of interoperability and raise new issues for coalition rules of engagement.

The various coalition members are likely to have different national interests and hence different levels of commitment to the operational mission – differences that an adversary will attempt to exploit to weaken coalition solidarity.

The day before the game, the Ethno supporters in America cancelled their fake travel bookings. They had also penetrated the airline computer systems to get the names of real American fans, and cancelled their bookings as well. The airlines quickly cancelled the additional flights they had scheduled and gave crews the day off. The ticket agency realized it was stuck with thousands of game tickets ordered using stolen

The possibilities of information warfare are limited only by the imagination of those waging it. While vital military systems are more likely to be secure against attack, less obvious targets may offer opportunities to attack supporting organizations, the economy, and the public.

credit card numbers, but couldn't sell them because no one could get a flight to the game.irate supporters blamed the WFL authorities for the mess and criticized them for accepting such a challenge in the first place. They returned home to watch the game on television, disillusioned even before it had started. The WFL would took the field with little spectator support, while fanatical Ethno supporters filled the stadium and crowded the sidelines.

Following an official reception on the eve of the game, a few key WFL players and coaches awoke in the middle of the night suffering from stomach cramps. Some blamed the shrimp cocktails, but others who had avoided the seafood also became ill. The host nation disavowed any responsibility and said it must have been the food on the chartered US plane that flew the team in. It was a mild form of food poisoning, not sufficient to knock them out of the game, but on game day, those affected felt drained of energy and were unable to perform to their normal standards.

Biological warfare is frequently identified as the poor man's atomic bomb. Even if an adversary is unwilling to resort to lethal BW agents, non-lethal agents may provide an effective means of incapacitating key personnel, such as aircrew, commanders, and senior staff, at critical times. It may even be impossible to be sure that an attack has occurred.



## Game Time

The Ethnoes chose a defensive strategy initially, nominating their goal keeper as their man who could handle the ball. Their intention was to frustrate the American offense, intercept their passes up the middle, play the ball up the flanks where the foreign players were, then center it to try to score goals before the Americans could get back in defense.

The WFL team, needing to score early to get their fans enthused, chose an offensive strategy, nominating their quarterback as the man who could handle the ball. Their plan was simple – aggressive offensive relying on deep passes to penetrate and score as many goals as possible.

The game started with a sustained WFL offense, but the Ethno players crowded the American offensive players in mid-field, frustrating the quarterback's attempts to pass to them. The foreign WFL players on the flanks had opportunities, but had not been integrated into the offensive plan and there was time for the Ethnoes to move to cover them if they had to. When the quarterback attempted deep passes to the flanks, the Ethno crowd on the sideline would obstruct the WFL receiver, and occasionally an Ethno player would emerge from hiding in the crowd to intercept a pass. The Ethno fans jostled and harassed the WFL interchange players and coaching staff on the sidelines, making it impossible for them to coordinate offensive plays. The Ethnoes scored only once, in a surprise attack from a deep pass up the sideline, but continually frustrated the WFL offense. In the final minutes

The use of human shields to inhibit strike operations has already been mentioned. Active civilian action to impede military operations has also been experienced in environments as diverse as Vietnam, Palestine, and Northern Ireland. An obstructive populace can make it extremely difficult for an ethical force to apply its combat power effectively.

of the half, when the Americans looked like scoring an equalizer, the Ethno fans invaded the pitch and crowded in front of the goal, obstructing play and allowing their team to reestablish its defense

At half time, sick of being taunted by Ethno supporters and frustrated by their team's lack of success, the few American supporters that had made it to the game started to leave. In the United States, irate fans jammed the switchboard

Public support will be a key factor in sustaining any conflict. The Gulf War has given the public an expectation of quick and decisive victory and minimal friendly casualties. Unless there are clear and demonstrable vital national interests at stake, the public is most unlikely to support prolonged operations or significant casualties.

at WFL headquarters demanding to know why the management had accepted such a ridiculous challenge. In the UK, Germany, Japan and Australia, the very few who had been interested simply switched channels to watch their local games.

WFL coaches, trying to coordinate a new offensive strategy, struggled to make themselves heard over the din of the Ethno crowd outside the team room. Their new plan was to move most of the big American players to the flanks to intimidate the Ethno fans and prevent them from interfering with the game, while the other players attacked up the middle.

The second half went little better for the WFL team. The Ethno supporters occupied so many American players on the sidelines that their own team had little trouble dominating play in mid-field, penetrated the weakened defense, and scored several quick goals.

The frustration of civilian interference can lead to the direct use of force against civilian populations. This diverts military effort and compromises values. In these days of instant global communications, television coverage of civilian casualties will quickly lead to loss of public support for military operations.

The WFL team simply wanted to end the game as quickly as possible and go home. They left to the taunts of an ecstatic Ethno crowd. The self-proclaimed World Champions, the “super power” of world football, had been soundly defeated.

### **The Post-Game Review**

Some individual lessons have already been discussed as they arose during the course of this hypothetical football challenge, but what are the overall lessons? Many of the individual threats and issues associated with asymmetry and interoperability have already been identified in public documents such as the National Security Strategy, the National Military Strategy, Joint Vision 2010, and the Quadrennial Defense Review. These documents all clearly identify asymmetric threats as a significant concern, and coalition operations as the norm. What is not so readily recognized is that the individual problems that have been identified cannot be considered separately. An imaginative adversary may apply many different asymmetric tactics together in a coordinated strategy to counteract the combat power of a technologically superior force.

*Now, if having received instructions to launch a campaign, we hasten to unfamiliar land where cultural influence has not penetrated, and communications are cut, and rush into its defiles, is it not difficult? If I go with a solitary army the enemy awaits me vigilantly. For the situations of the attacker and a defender are vastly different. How much more so when the enemy concentrates on deception and uses many misleading devices! If we have made no plans we plunge in headlong. By braving the dangers and entering perilous places we face the calamity of being trapped or inundated. Marching as if drunk, we may run into an unexpected fight. When we stop at night we are worried by false*

*alarms, if we hasten along unprepared we fall into ambushes This is to plunge  
an army of bears and tigers into the land of death Ho Yen-hsi<sup>1</sup>*

The Gulf War demonstrated the technical superiority and overwhelming combat power of the US-led coalition so clearly that no nation would currently be willing to confront the United States and its allies directly Asymmetric challenges will be the norm until a credible peer competitor emerges, something that is unlikely to occur inside twenty years However, the absence of a credible peer competitor does not mean the absence of a credible challenger, as we have seen from the Ethnoes

*There are circumstances in war when many cannot attack few, and others when  
the weak can master the strong One able to manipulate such circumstances will  
be victorious Tu Yu<sup>2</sup>*

Alliances have always been fragile enough to offer opportunities for an adversary to exploit Sun Tzu wrote that attacking the enemy's strategy is of supreme importance, and that disrupting his alliances is next best<sup>3</sup> Alliance vulnerabilities are greater where the vital national interests of all coalition partners are not equally threatened, which is likely to be the case in regional contingencies where some nations may be fighting for national survival, and others for economic or lesser interests Technology offers the opportunity to integrate joint forces to achieve tremendous synergies, and all western nations are working toward this goal, but national issues

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<sup>1</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans Samuel B Griffith (London Oxford University Press, 1963, Oxford University Press Paperback, 1971), 105

<sup>2</sup> Ibid , 82

<sup>3</sup> Ibid . 77-78

will make similar degrees of integration between coalition partners much more difficult to achieve. The synergy within national forces may be greater, but the synergy between coalition partners may be lower, making the inherent vulnerability of alliances at least as important as in Sun Tzu's day.

To meet and defeat asymmetric challenges, the United States and its allies must manipulate the circumstances of any conflict more effectively than our adversary. We must anticipate his tactics, devote resources to preparing to counter them, and be flexible enough to respond to changing circumstances. Forces structured, trained and equipped for conventional warfare have, in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Somalia, failed to defeat weaker and technologically inferior adversaries. Conventional combat power alone will not be sufficient to deal with all likely threats; technology will not always defeat imagination.

*As water has no constant form, there are in war no constant conditions. Thus, one able to gain the victory by modifying his tactics in accordance with the enemy situation may be said to be divine. Sun Tzu<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid , 101